

My First NOLC!

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As a resident on the trauma service, I leapt at the opportunity to attend the 2015 National Orthopaedic Leadership Conference (NOLC). I readily passed the pager to an unsuspecting junior resident, smiling as I thought of the 2 a.m. pages he'd have to face regarding stool softener and "urgent" consults without imaging.

I thought I was ready when I arrived in Washington, D.C. I had my University of Texas at Austin College of Engineering padfolio dusted off and in my moist palms, as well as a box of 500 business cards hot off the press. I had visited the government relations section of the AAOS website, completed the 'Hill Training' webinar, and downloaded my 'Congress' app, so I could quickly look up basic information and photos of politicians. I felt on top of my game.

Before I entered the maze that is the Capitol building, I was told not to bring loose change. Since my usual attire of XXL scrub pants can barely hold my iPhone 6, bringing loose change was not an issue, so I glided right through security. But as we traveled down the halls, I still felt more like a tourist at Versailles than an advocate for orthopaedic surgeons, residents, and our patients. I had to keep switching my padfolio between my hands because my fingers were



Dr. Stautberg (second from left) and other members of the Texas delegation with Rep. Michael C. Burgess, MD (R-Texas) (center).

perspiring like I was watching the fourth quarter of the NBA finals.

As we entered the first congressional office, I politely hovered in the back, allowing the more experienced advocates to find their seats. Of course, two seats on the couch directly in front of the Representative were open, and my mentor's eyes signaled to me to make my move.

I made my way to the front, feeling my sympathetic nerves accelerating; I could hear my pulse and had to consciously control my

breathing. And the Representative hadn't started speaking yet.

No webinar or other training can prepare a resident for the power that comes with sitting in a congressional office and seeing the Representative listen to our concerns and work to understand them. It's important to see the blue folders with highlighted information, to read the leaflets, and to note how the verbiage is constructed, but it's even more important to see surgeons shake hands with lawmakers with whom they have per-

sonal relationships. That's information my 'Congress' app won't tell me. I hope more residents have the opportunity to witness this interaction at future NOLC meetings.

Eventually, on a future trip to The Hill, I hope to have that type of relationship. Until then, I have 499 business cards left. N

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